

VZCZCXRO1767  
OO RUEHGH  
DE RUEHUL #0758/01 1320635  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
O 120635Z MAY 09  
FM AMEMBASSY SEOUL  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4300  
RUCPDOC/USDOC WASHDC 8533  
RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHINGTON DC  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC//DDI/OEA//  
RHFMUNA/USCINCPAC HONOLULU HI//FPA//  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC  
RUEKJCS/Joint STAFF WASHINGTON DC  
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC//DB-Z//  
RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW 9705  
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 5849  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 5941  
RUEHGH/AMCONSUL SHANGHAI 0676  
RUEHSH/AMCONSUL SHENYANG 4365  
RUEHIN/AIT TAIPEI 3344  
RUEHGP/AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE 6541  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0953  
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 2291  
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 1365  
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 1974

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 SEOUL 000758

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PREL PGOV MARR ECON KPAO KS US

SUBJECT: SEOUL - PRESS BULLETIN; May 12, 2009

TOP HEADLINES

---

Chosun Ilbo

University of Hong Kong Ranked First in Asian University Assessment  
Conducted by Chosun Ilbo and QS; KAIST  
and Seoul National University Ranked  
Seventh and Eighth, Respectively

JoongAng Ilbo

Ethnic Koreans Living Overseas Come Home for Health Care;  
Inexpensive Services, Quality Care  
Bringing Back Ethnic Koreans

Dong-a Ilbo

Gyeongsangnam-do Province Governor to be Summoned  
for Taking Huge Amount of Money  
from Former Taekwang Industrial CEO

Hankook Ilbo, Hankyoreh Shinmun, Segye Ilbo, All TVs  
Angered by Supreme Court Ethics Committee's Decision to Spare  
Justice Shin Any Punishment for His Attempt to Influence Politically  
Sensitive Trials, Junior Judges Call for  
"Justice Shin to Step Down"

Seoul Shinmun

ROKG Seeks to Merge Allowances of Public Servants  
with Their Basic Pay

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

---

According to Japan's Mainichi Shimbun, there is a high possibility  
that North Korea might have planned in advance to arrest the two  
U.S. journalists who were caught in March reporting on the plight of  
North Korean refugees along the China-North Korea border. (Dong-a,  
Segye)

A U.S. journalist jailed in Iran, meanwhile, was freed yesterday  
after an Iranian court reduced her prison term for spying to a  
two-year suspended sentence. (All)

MEDIA ANALYSIS

-----  
-North Korea  
-----

Moderate Seoul Shinmun gave inside-page play to a report that Seoul and Washington have decided not to hurry talks with North Korea, which has boycotted the Six-Party Talks. A senior ROKG official was quoted: "In a situation where North Korea refuses to budge an inch on repeated U.S. overtures for bilateral and multilateral talks, the U.S. and the ROK judge it better to watch further developments, rather than hurrying talks with North Korea."

Conservative Dong-a Ilbo and Segye Ilbo replayed a May 11 report by Japan's Mainichi Shimbun that North Korea might have planned in advance to arrest the two U.S. journalists who were caught in March reporting on the plight of North Korean refugees along the China-North Korea border. The Mainichi Shimbun report cited a source in Beijing privy to Chinese government (intelligence) saying that a local Korean-Chinese guide, who had taken the U.S. journalists to the border area, admitted to Chinese authorities that he was a collaborator with North Korea.

-Iran - Release of Roxana Saberi  
-----

Citing the foreign media, the ROK media carried inside-page reports on the May 11 release of U.S.-born reporter Roxana Saberi from a Tehran jail after an Iranian court reduced her prison term for spying to a two-year suspended sentence.

SEOUL 00000758 002 OF 003

Newspapers carried the following headlines: "The Green Light On for Improved U.S.-Iran Relations" (Conservative Chosun Ilbo and Dong-a Ilbo); "A Warm Breeze Blows for Improved Bilateral Ties" (moderate Hankook Ilbo); and "Release of U.S. Reporter Likely to Act as a Catalyst for Improved U.S.-Iran Relations" (left-leaning Hankyoreh Shinmun and moderate Seoul Shinmun)

OPINIONS/EDITORIALS  
-----

WASHINGTON AND SEOUL SHOULD DISCUSS DELAYING THE TRANSFER OF WARTIME OPERATIONAL CONTROL  
(Dong-a Ilbo, May 12, 2009, Page 31)

There are a growing number of reasons why the transfer of wartime operational control of ROK troops from the ROK-U.S. Combined Forces Command (CFC) to the ROK should be delayed from its original schedule of April 2012. For one, North Korea's military threat, which is the most important consideration in the transfer of wartime operational control, is getting worse day by day. Also, that over 60 reserve officers urged the ROKG last month to postpone the wartime command shift can be seen as a manifestation of ardent patriotism. Seoul should take seriously (their) warning that if the ROKG recklessly pushes for the shift before assuming an independent national defense stance for the sole purpose of meeting the agreed upon transfer deadline with the U.S., it will be difficult to prevent North Korea's provocations.

The Roh Moo-hyun Administration, in a situation where it was difficult to fully control or curb North Korea's provocation, simply viewed the wartime command shift as a matter of independence and sovereignty, thereby sparking anxiety. And although the Roh Administration said, "We will create an elite unit by 2020 for our self-reliant national defense," their assertion turned out to be just a bluff because they had not carefully considered the ROK's actual capabilities. The introduction of the Global Hawk High-Altitude, Long-Endurance Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (HAE UAV) program, a key military capability needed to collect strategic intelligence about North Korea, was delayed until 2015, and the introduction of tanker aircraft, which are necessary to expand the operation area of fighter jets, was postponed until 2014. (These postponements) are a result of it being impossible to secure a budget to replace the war capability of USFK in the short term.

The relocation of Yongsan Garrison and the U.S. Second Division in northern Gyeonggi-do province, which is linked to the transfer of wartime operational control, was postponed to 2015 and 2016. (However), there is no guarantee that another postponement will not occur. In this regard, a considerable amount of responsibility should be borne by the U.S. since it had agreed to the transfer of wartime operational control in order to assure strategic flexibility.

While preparations for the transfer of wartime operational control from the U.S. to the ROK have hit a snag, North Korea launched a rocket and is threatening a second nuclear test this year. Therefore, it is self-destructive for the ROK to take over wartime operational control and dissolve the U.S.-ROK Combined Forces Command despite this deteriorated security environment.

The U.S. and ROK governments should review the seriousness of the security situation on the Korean Peninsula. At a summit scheduled for June in Washington, leaders from both countries will mainly discuss their future strategic alliance. No other pending issues are more urgent than reviewing the transfer. President Lee Myung-bak should be determined to rectify errors in the security strategy to which the previous government has committed itself. He should clearly explain to the U.S. problems about the transfer. This is a mission for the Commander-in-Chief, the very person responsible for national security. The U.S. should not take the reasons for postponing the transfer lightly. If the ROK's security is shaky, then the U.S.-ROK alliance becomes meaningless. The U.S.

SEOUL 00000758 003 OF 003

and the ROK should address the timing of transferring wartime operational control by bracing themselves against the worst case scenario.

STANTON